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EPA Environmental News

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EPA Cites “Blackwater” Violations at Three West Virginia Coal Mines

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has cited three West Virginia coal companies for unlawful discharges of “blackwater,” a mixture of fine coal dust and water.

In separate Clean Water Act complaints, EPA seeks a \$33,000 penalty against Catenary Coal Co. of Eskdale; \$22,000 against Elk Run Coal Co. of Sylvester; and \$11,000 against Goals Coal Co. of Naoma.

The administrative complaints cite the companies for violating their state-issued Clean Water Act permits by discharging blackwater into tributaries of the Kanawha River.

“Mine runoff with high concentrations of solids and minerals can literally choke a waterway. Blackwater pollution kills aquatic life and ruins the natural beauty of these streams and rivers. West Virginia and EPA are committed to take appropriate legal actions to fight this pollution,” said EPA Regional Administrator Bradley Campbell.

The West Virginia Division of Environmental Protection (WVDEP) investigated these discharges and later worked with EPA to develop these cases. The Clean Water Act permits issued by WVDEP are designed to protect the quality and recreational uses of these waterways. Each of the permits prohibit the discharge of blackwater, which can cause visible floating solids or a change in color to the waterway.

Catenary Coal Co. operates the Campbells Creek Complex, a coal processing complex in Eskdale, W.Va. According to EPA’s complaint, this facility violated its permit by discharging blackwater into the Pointlick Fork of Campbells Creek on January 8, February 23-24, and April 28, 1999.

(more)

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Elk Run Coal Co. owns a coal processing plant, deep mine, refuse area, and ash disposal site in Sylvester, W.Va. The company was cited for permit violations on February 12, 1999, when a damaged culvert pipe discharged about 1,500 gallons of blackwater into Little Elk Creek, and on March 3, 1999, when a blackwater discharge discolored some 2,200 feet of the creek.

Goals Coal Co. owns a coal mine, refuse disposal area, and coal preparation plant in Naoma, W.Va. EPA alleges that the company unlawfully discharged blackwater into the Big Coal River on February 23, 1999. This discharge was reportedly caused by an overflow of coal refuse slurry from the facility’s coal washing operation

The companies are entitled to hearings to contest the alleged violations and proposed penalties.

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